(b) if so, the factors responsible for such huge losses;

(c) whether Government would take steps to check such losses suffered by DoT without sharing any burden on common beneficiaries; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) and (b) Available data indicate a down trend in revenue receipts due to new tariffs which came into effect from 1.5.1999 based on the Tariff order of March 99 of TRAI.

(c) and (d) In order to insulate the common man from the increase in tariff DoT in its alternative tariff package has not increased any rental and call charges for rural and low calling urban subscribers (those making calls up to 200 per month). Government has requested TRAI to re-work the tariff for 2000-2001 in view of anticipated substantial drop in DoT's revenue. Despite the door in revenue DoT's targets are being maintained and the gap covered by increased market borrowings.

Accountability of TRAI

2009. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the report captioned "New Panel to Iron out Telecom, Disputes, PM" published in the Statesman dated 21 st November, 1999;

(b) if so, the details of panel with its proposed composition and specific terms or reference;

(c) whether the PM is aware of the profligacy in the financial conduct of the TRAI adversely commented upon by the CAG; and

(d) if so, the manner in which the proposed panel will address the question of the accountability of the TRAI?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Government had constituted on 13.12.99 a Group on Telecom and IT Convergence under the Chairmanship of the Finance Minister. The terms of reference of this Group, *inter alia,* included consideration and making recommendations to strengthen the TRAI through suitable legislative amendments, to prepare the draft of a new comprehensive statute to replace the

Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, keeping in view the rapid convergence of telecom, computers, television and electronics, etc.

(c) and (d) C& AG of India in his report for the year 1997-98 (No. 4 of 1999) covering "other autonomous bodies" presented to Parliament on 29th October, 1999 has commented adversely on the expenditure incurred on certain facilities to Chairperson, Members and Staff and Officers of TRAI. On the orders of the appropriate authority, the Department had issued orders regularising the expenditure incurred by Chairperson and Members from the date of assumption of their office till 14.3.99.

Based on the recommendations of the Group on Telecom and IT Convergence in the matter regarding strengthening of TRAI through suitable legislative amendment, the TRAI (Amendment) Ordinance 2000 was promulgated on 24th January 2000 to bring about certain structural changes in the principal TRAI Act. After the amendment to section 10 of the principal Act through the Ordinance, the terms and conditions of service of the staff, officers and other employees of TRAI shall now be prescribed by the Central Government.

Setting up of New Telephone Exchange in Meghalaya

2010. SHRI ONWARD L. NONGTDU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of telephone exchanges functioning at present in the State of Meghalaya;

(b) the number of new telephone exchanges are likely to be set up in the State during the Ninth plan;

(c) the details of funds allocated for the purpose; and

(d) the steps being taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR): (a) Sir, 54 Telephone exchanges are functioning at present in the State of Meghalaya.

(b) 20 new telephone exchanges are likely to be set up in the State in the years 1999-2000, 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 of the Ninth Five Year Plan.

(c) For 1999-2000 the funds allocated are 48.75 crores, Demands for Grant for the years 2000-2001 in respect of Department of Telecom Services has not